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OSD PASS JESSICA POWERS; PACOM PASS FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/21/2032

TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL NZ AF US

SUBJECT: NEXT ROUND OF NEW ZEALAND DEPLOYMENTS TO  
AFGHANISTAN -- MAYBE SAS, MAYBE TRAINERS

Classified By: Embassy Wellington DCM David J. Keegan, Reasons E.O. 12958, 1.4 (a), (b), and (d)

¶1. (C) DCM recently discussed current mil-mil relations with New Zealand Ministry of Defence (MOD) CEO John McKinnon. McKinnon reported that MOD was preparing a submission to a select Cabinet committee on future deployments to Afghanistan after the current deployment cycle concludes in September ¶2008. The report would need to be approved and then signed off by the full Cabinet no later than early December in order for the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) to be ready to deploy or redeploy any forces by the September 2008 time frame.

¶2. (C) McKinnon noted that the Government was very conscious that the New Zealand public continues to express support for NZDF deployments to Afghanistan. However, the Prime Minister particularly is quite conscious that there is a mix of factors contributing to that support, one of which is the relative dearth of casualties. That factor will weigh in, though not necessarily determine, the Cabinet's decision.

Victoria Cross & the SAS

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¶3. (SBU) The Government was also quite conscious that the awarding of the Victoria Cross to SAS Corporal Willie Apiata had drawn a unique and positive public spotlight on the SAS role in Afghanistan. Even given that Apiata received his decoration for valor in a very bloody fight, both Apiata's action and the role of the SAS in Afghanistan had received near universal public support. A documentary by a local TV network on the SAS and its training camp has also been viewed very positively.

¶4. (S) Any deployment of SAS forces back to Afghanistan would have to take into account the fact that the force is under-manned. It is also the most ready of any NZ forces and therefore would be the first force to be called into any contingency such as Fiji or an evacuation from Fiji. Having mentioned Fiji, McKinnon immediately said that he should only have been speaking of the Pacific Islands in general, but he left no doubt that Fiji was the first and most pressing contingency. He suggested that even if SAS forces deployed to Afghanistan, it might be necessary to consider how and whether they might be extracted to respond to an island crisis.

Training the Trainers

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¶15. (C) In addition, MOD was evaluating a "train the trainer" program as one of several other options for a NZDF role in Afghanistan. It was still too early to assess how this or other options would eventually be handled in a paper for Defence Minister Phil Goff to present to Cabinet. One issue would be logistical and transport support, but it was difficult to assess at this point how large a factor that would be.

A-4 Options  
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¶16. (C) MOD is in the preliminary stages of attempting to flesh out and verify another approach to selling its retired A-4 attack aircraft. While it is aware that OSD has promised to inform GNZ as soon as possible on whether its current sales proposal will be approved, NZ has recently become aware of another opportunity, which he declined to specify. When and if that possibility becomes more defined, MOD will brief OSD in Washington to ensure maximum coordination. McKinnon made it clear that the factor driving MOD was simple: "the money would be nice."  
KEEGAN